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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to examined how well seminary training prepares ministers for their role. A questionnaire-survey was developed and completed by 400 senior pastors of mainline denominational churches in California. Close-ended items were analyzed statistically and responses to open-ended questions were evaluated and categorized. Findings indicated: (1) 15 skills identified by the study were all judged to be essential for the senior pastor's role in the church; (2) seminary education was not seen to adequately prepare pastors with these essential skills; (3) there was a gap between the perceived needs of the pastor and perceptions regarding seminary training in seven of the skills (including staff building, financial planning, and time management); and (4) perceived needs and seminary training appeared to match in four of the skills: counseling, communication, social trends, and interpersonal skills. The paper provides detailed analyses of responses to each question. Ten recommendations drawn from responses to the open-ended questions are listed, as are suggestions for further research. The survey instrument is appended. (DB)

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# PASTORING THE CHURCH INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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**Pastoring the Church Into the Twenty-first Century**

**Background**

In 1994, the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust commissioned a review of the graduate theological education in the Pacific Northwest. The group focused on the role of the pastor in the local church and the seminary preparing pastors for their role. The results of the 1994 study showed that graduates of seminaries are being confronted with congregational needs for leadership for which they are unprepared. Statistical reports regarding senior pastors of mainline churches are alarming: research shows that many pastors feel unprepared for the leadership role of the local church. Research provided by the Barna Group (1993) shows that ministers are among the most frustrated occupational groups in America. Perhaps, this is why the average tenure of a senior pastor is only four years. The major reason for leaving a church is a feeling of failure by not adequately leading the congregation. The church can not make progress in a changing and diverse culture when the leaders of the local body admit they are not proficient in the areas of leadership and management. Yet, "nine out of 10 pastors of mainline churches (88%) have attended a seminary... and are among the most highly educated professionals in the nation" (Barna, 1993, p.35). Where is the problem? Is it with the individuals who are leading the local congregation or is the problem with the training institute, the seminary? According to Barna (1993), "The evidence is compelling that many seminaries are not preparing men and women for the job that the typical church expects them to perform" (p. 26). Those graduates of seminaries are also the senior pastors of mainline denominational churches.

**Objectives/Purposes**

Believing strongly that this problem also exists in California, the authors sought to develop an instrument that would determine whether or not this was true. The main purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the senior pastor is able to fulfill the required pulpit and leadership role in the "mainline denominational church" as a result of the training received at the seminary. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine the perception of the senior pastor toward the education that the theological institution provided for their leadership role in the local church. Finally, this study was used to determine whether or not a gap exists between the perceived needs of the senior pastor and the education received from the graduate theological institution.

**Perspectives/Theoretical Framework**

Of considerable concern are the statistical reports regarding senior pastors of mainline churches. Many, by their own admission, feel unprepared for the leadership role of the church. While they are among the most highly educated professionals in America, they are one of the most frustrated occupational groups. Among reasons cited for poor leadership in the local church is the seminaries' failure to resolutely identify, recruit, and develop qualified leaders for congregational settings, instead deploying educators and preachers. This paper seeks to determine whether or not the senior pastor is able to fulfill the required pulpit and leadership role in the local mainline denominational church as a result of the training received at the seminary.

## Methods, Techniques, Modes of Inquiry

In order to determine whether or not the senior pastor was able to fulfill the required role, a questionnaire-survey (Appendix A), was developed and was utilized to gather data. The instrument was designed for quick and easy completion to encourage response and expedite completion and return. The questionnaire-survey was composed of 30 close-ended items with ordered response choices established in the conceptual framework of the Likert scale (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p. 244-245). The questionnaire-survey included one close-ended question that helped establish if further education was sought to fulfill the role of senior pastor. Three open-ended statements were included for participants to give their opinion regarding the education they received from the seminary they attended.

Content validity and reliability were established to ensure the trustworthiness of the instrument. Experts in the field of religious education were given the questionnaire-survey to determine the content validity of the instrument. They were asked to critique each item in the survey instrument for clarity and relevance to the study's research objectives. The reviewers were asked to match each survey item with Research Objectives 1 and 2. A consensus of four of five was necessary to confirm the assignment of survey items to research objectives. The form used in the validation process is in Appendix B.

A pilot study was conducted to establish reliability and usability of the instrument. Participants of the pilot study were similar to the full population being surveyed. Twenty- four surveys were sent out and twelve were received back. Following Isaac and Michael's (1995) pre-testing recommendations, the returned instruments were examined for trouble signs, misinterpretations, and ambiguities. Information gathered from the pretest was analyzed, and any necessary additions, deletions or modifications were made.

Data collected from the questionnaire-survey were entered into a personal computer database using StatView, a statistical package. A coded score from the Likert-scale was computed for each close-ended item on the survey. The open-ended questions were evaluated and categorized into general categories that represent the perceptions and shared beliefs of the respondents.

## Data Sources

The population for this study consisted of senior pastors of mainline denominational churches in California. One thousand questionnaire-survey packets were sent out on January 9, 1998. The packets included a letter of explanation, the questionnaire-survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. On January 19, 1998, 1,000 follow-up postcards were sent out. The total number accepting the invitation to participate in the study was 400.

## Results and/or Conclusions

The data collected from 400 participants were analyzed to address each research objective. Descriptive measures were used to report frequency and percentage distributions. Tables and charts were also developed to answer research objectives 1 and 2. A non-parametric approach was utilized to analyze the data to answer research objective 3.

The findings indicated the following: (a) The 15 skills presented in this study are essential for the senior pastor to fulfill the required leadership role in the contemporary church. (b) Seminary education did not adequately prepare the senior pastor with the essential skills necessary for their leadership role. (c) There is a gap between the perceived needs of the pastor and the perceptions

regarding seminary training in 7 of the 15 skills presented in this study. Among the seven skills identified were: staff building, financial planning, time management, administrative skills, conflict resolution, congregational development, and vision development. (d) Another 4 of the 15 skills (decision making, problem solving, leadership #1, and leadership #2) did not indicate a high percentage either way. (e) There may not be a gap between the perceived needs of the senior pastor and the perception of the pastor regarding seminary training in 4 of the 15 skills. The four skills include counseling, communication, social trends, and interpersonal skills.

**Research Objective 1**
**Determine the perceived needs of the senior pastor in the local contemporary church.**
Tables 1 and 2 and figures 1 and 2 are examples of the data collected from questionnaire-survey items 1.2 and 6.0 in response to research objective 1.

Leadership Skills-1.2

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Item 1.2.

Item 1.2: For successful pastoring of a local church, it is critical to be educated about or receive training in leadership skills.

| | (1) Strongly Agree | (2) Agree | (3) Neither Agree Nor | (4) Disagree | (5) Strongly Disagree | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| n | 282 | 108 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 400 |
| % | 70.50 | 27.00 | 2.50 | 0 | 0 | 100.0 |

The information collected from Table 1 is illustrated in Figure 1.

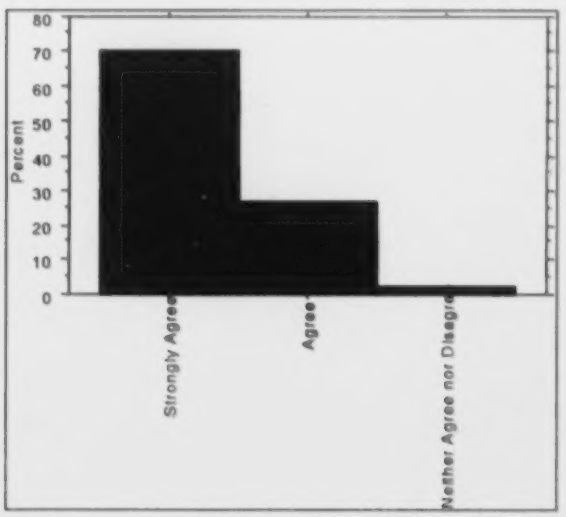


Figure 1. Percentage of responses for Likert item 1.2.

Staff Building-6.0

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Item 6.0.

Item 6.0: The senior pastor's ability to build a church staff team is critical for growth of the local church.

| | (1) Strongly Agree | (2) Agree | (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree | (4) Disagree | (5) Strongly Disagree | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| n | 208 | 156 | 33 | 3 | 0 | 400 |
| % | 52.00 | 39.00 | 8.25 | .75 | 0 | 100.0 |

The information collected from Table 2 is illustrated in Figure 2.

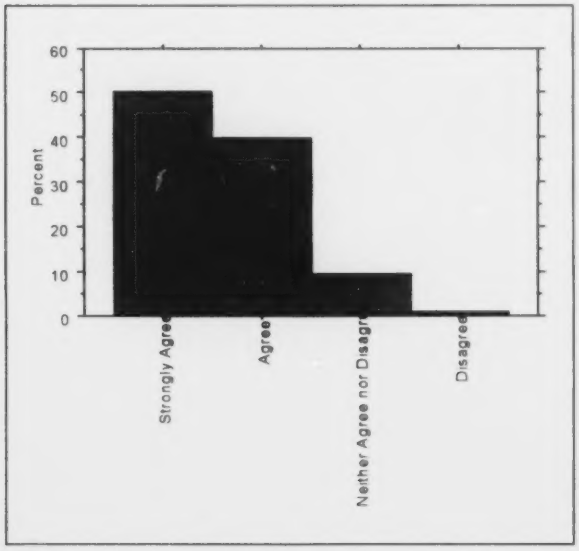


Figure 2. Percentage of responses for Likert item 6.0.

**Research Objective 2**

**Determine the attitude of the senior pastor toward the education that the theological institution provided for their leadership role in the church.**

Tables 3 and 4 and figures 3 and 4 are examples of the data collected from the questionnaire-survey for items 8.4 and 13.0 in response to Research Objective 2.

Leadership Skills-8.4

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Item 8.4.

Item 8.43: As a direct result of your seminary education, you are equipped to motivate, mobilize, and manage people.

| | (1) Strongly Agree | (2) Agree | (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree | (4) Disagree | (5) Strongly Disagree | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| n | 20 | 122 | 114 | 125 | 19 | 400 |
| % | 5.00 | 30.50 | 28.50 | 31.25 | 4.75 | 100.0 |

The information collected from Table 3 is illustrated in Figure 3.

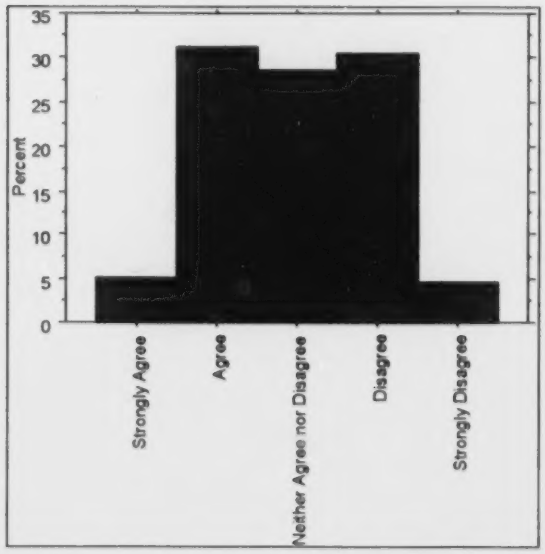


Figure 3. Percentage of responses for Likert item 8.4.

Staff Building-13.0

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Item 13.0.

Item 13.0: The seminary curriculum prepared you to build a church staff team.

| | (1) Strongly Agree | (2) Agree | (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree | (4) Disagree | (5) Strongly Disagree | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| n | 8 | 51 | 78 | 200 | 63 | 400 |
| % | 2.00 | 12.75 | 19.50 | 50.00 | 15.75 | 100.0 |

The information collected from Table 4 is illustrated in Figure 4.

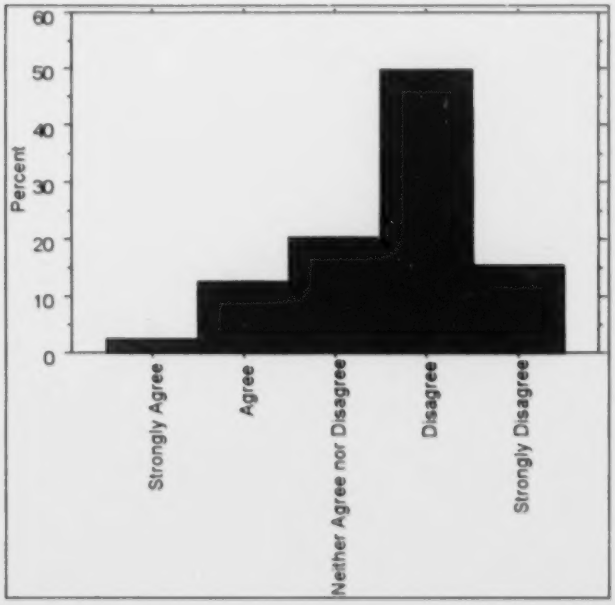


Figure 4. Percentage of responses for Likert item 13.0.

**Research Objective 3**

**Determine if there is a gap between the perceived needs of the senior pastor in the local contemporary church and the perceptions regarding seminary training of these same pastors.**

The data in tables 5 and 6 were drawn from a cross tabulation of the responses to the like items associated with Research Objective 1 and Research Objective 2. Interestingly, the cross-tabs indicate a concentration of strongly agree and agree responses for pastoral need and strongly disagree and disagree for education and training received at the seminary.

Leadership Skills 1.2, 8.4

Table 5

A Cross Tabulation of Responses to Item 1.2 and Responses to Item 8.4.

| | | Item 1.2 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | SA | A | NA | D | SD | n |
| | SA | 18 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| Item | A | 88 | 31 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 122 |
| 8.4 | NA | 66 | 43 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 114 |
| | D | 96 | 27 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 125 |
| | SD | 12 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| | n | 282 | 108 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 400 |

Note. Entries in body of table are numbers of persons who select each Item 1.2 category and the corresponding Item 8.4 category.

Staff Building 6.0, 13.0

Table 6

A Cross Tabulation of Responses to Item 6.0 and Responses to Item 13.0.

| | | Item 6.0 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | SA | A | NA | D | SD | n |
| | SA | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Item | A | 26 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 51 |
| 13.0 | NA | 33 | 36 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 78 |
| | D | 107 | 77 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 200 |
| | SD | 35 | 22 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 63 |
| | n | 208 | 156 | 33 | 3 | 0 | 400 |

Note. Entries in body of table are numbers of persons who select each Item 6.0 category and the corresponding Item 13.0 category.



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To provide a comparison of the "needs" and "attitudes", a Pareto chart (Figure 5) was prepared with the needs items being arranged in order of decreasing percentages. Associated with each of the "needs" item response was the corresponding "attitude" item response.

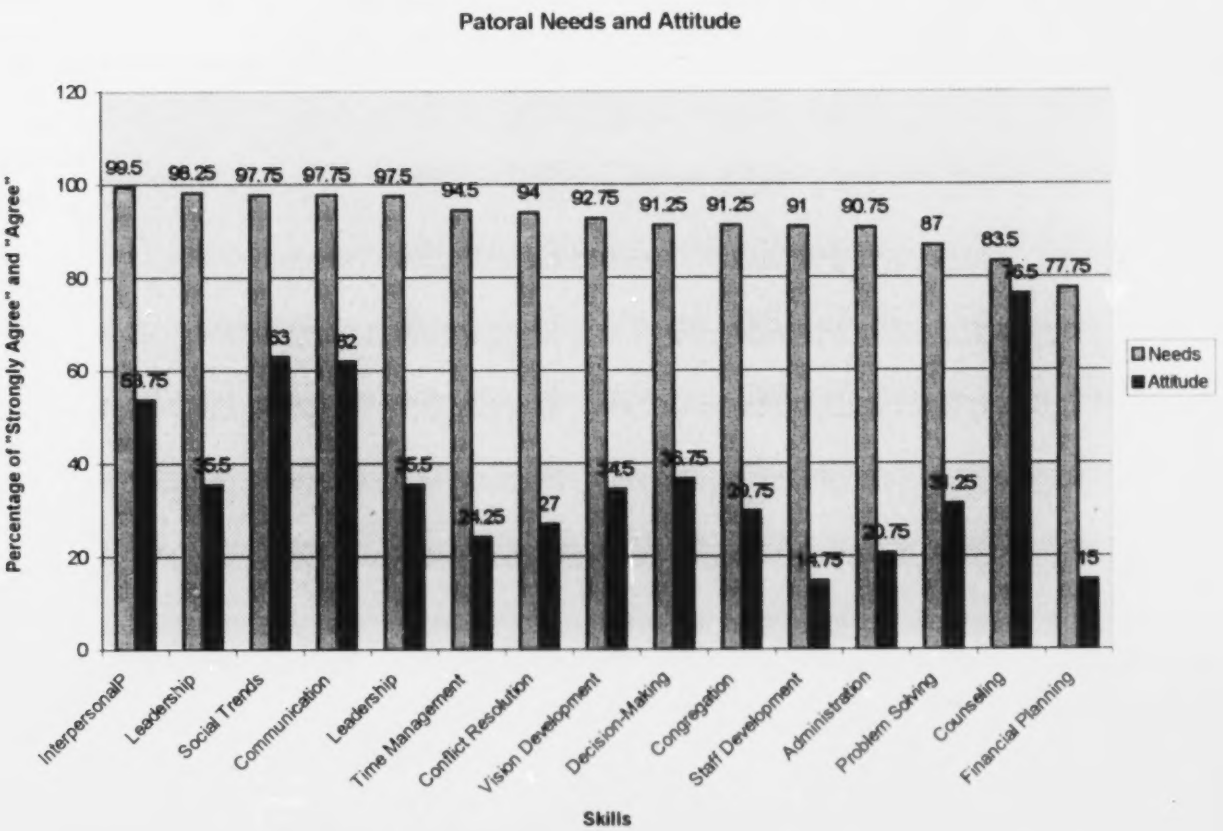


Figure 5. Survey items associated with Research Objective #1 and Research Objective #2 ranked from highest to lowest when collapsing categories "strongly agree" and "agree."

## Educational or Scientific Importance of the Study

It is the belief of the authors that seminaries that will be successful in the 21st century must equip the graduate with training for spiritual leadership in the context of a rapidly changing and diverse society. This study should assist seminaries in evaluating their current structure to determine what changes are in order, if any.



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## Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey in this study and the comments made by the respondents on the open-ended items of the survey, the following recommendations are made:

1. The seminary needs to establish a working relationship with the local churches to assure that their educational programs fulfill the basic needs within the church. Communication with the local church can assist the seminary in developing programs and curriculum that would help the seminary graduate meet the expectation of the local church.
2. The seminary must evaluate, and as necessary, redesign the core curriculum to create a balance between theological, biblical, and practical courses of ministry skills. This balance will help to ensure that the seminary graduate is receiving the necessary training to fulfill the leadership needs of the local church.
3. The seminary should involve more full-time pastors in instructional roles. This will help to bring real life situations into the classroom.
4. The seminary should employ "practitioners" in fields of specialized studies such as: conflict resolution, counseling, administration, and financial planning.
5. The seminary should involve faculty and full-time pastors to serve as mentors to students. This will help the ministerial student to participate in parish life in a supervised setting.
6. The seminary should teach practical ministry courses in church settings. This will allow the church and seminary to become instructional partners.
7. The seminary should consider a four-year program which would effectively integrate theological, biblical, and practical ministry courses.
8. The seminary should develop continuing education courses to assist the local church pastor. This will provide training that will empower full-time pastors to work effectively with the necessary tools.
9. The seminary should develop on-line programs to assist pastors in rural areas. This will help those pastors who can not leave their church to receive additional education.
10. The seminary faculty must have current local church experience. It should be mandatory that every four to five years each full-time professor spend at least six months as a pastoral staff person in a local church. This will help to keep the professor in touch with reality.

## Further Research

Based on the results of this study and supporting literature, the following recommendations for further research are made:

1. Evaluate current seminary programs to determine to what degree these leadership skills have been included in the equipping and training of the graduate student.
2. Study a seminary graduating class of a certain year. Conduct a follow-up study of that same class over a period of years to determine their effectiveness in the ministry as a direct result of their training from the seminary.
3. Study the retention rate of pastors to determine primary causes for leaving the ministry.
4. Study seminary faculty and administration for local church involvement.
5. Study the definition of the pastoral role in the local church as defined by the pastor and the church members.
6. Study the non-respondents to determine who they are, why they did not respond and how similar or dissimilar they are to the respondent demographics.
7. Apply this study to other regions within the United States.
8. Survey seminaries regarding their perception of the leadership skills identified in this study and compare to the perceptions of their graduates.

**References**:

Barna, George. (1993). Today's Pastors. Ventura, California: Regal Books.

Isaac, Stephen and Michael, William B. (1995). Handbook in Research and Evaluation (3rd Edition). San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.

McMillan, James H. and Schumacher, Sally. (1993). Research in Education (3rd ed.). New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

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## PASTORAL SURVEY

### PART I

This survey is concerned with your perceptions and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Church membership is in decline. Research describes a gap that exists between the needs of a senior pastor and the seminary training received by the pastor. The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine if this is true. Below are statements regarding the perceived needs of the senior pastor in relation to leading the local contemporary church. The section following, focuses on the senior pastor's attitude, today, regarding seminary education received.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the following manner:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | Circle letter | SA |
| Agree | Circle letter | A |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | Circle letter | NA |
| Disagree | Circle letter | D |
| Strongly Disagree | Circle letter | SD |

For example: If you strongly agree with the following statement, you should circle it in this way:

The seminary provided strong leadership training.....SA A NA D SD

---

**Pastoral Needs**

1.0 For successful pastoring of a local church, it is critical to be educated about or receive training in:
- 1.1 decision-making skills..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.2 leadership skills .....SA A NA D SD
- 1.3 communication skills..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.4 conflict resolution.....SA A NA D SD
- 1.5 counseling skills..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.6 congregational development..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.7 administrative skills..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.8 financial planning..... SA A NA D SD
- 1.9 vision development..... SA A NA D SD

2.0 kInterpersonal skills are a prerequisite for pastoral effectiveness and success ..... SA A NA D SD

3.0 Leadership skills, which involve motivating others, team building, planning, organizing, operating and evaluating the church are a necessity for the senior pastor ..... SA A NA D SD

4.0 The senior pastor of a local church must understand today's society ..... SA A NA D SD

5.0 Time management skills are necessary for the senior pastor.....SA A NA D SD

6.0 The senior pastor's ability to build a church staff team is critical for the growth of the local church.....SA A NA D SD

7.0 The ability to find solutions to problems is a necessary skill in pastoring a local congregation .....SA A NA D SD

Strongly Agree = SA  Agree = A  Neither Agree nor Disagree = NA  Disagree = D  Strongly Disagree = SD

**Attitude towards seminary education**

8.0 As a direct result of your seminary education, you are equipped to:
- 8.1 build a church staff team.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.2 lead in developing a church vision..... SA A NA D SD
- 8.3 counsel people in the church.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.4 motivate, mobilize, and manage people.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.5 communicate to lay people ..... SA A NA D SD
- 8.6 resolve church conflict.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.7 plan a budget.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.8 lead in the decision-making process.....SA A NA D SD
- 8.9 solve problems effectively.....SA A NA D SD

9.0 The seminary curriculum addressed current social trends ..... SA A NA D SD

10.0 The seminary curriculum addressed time management as a necessary skill for the senior pastor..... SA A NA D SD

11.0 The seminary curriculum equipped you to successfully manage the administrative duties of the local church..... SA A NA D SD

12.0 The seminary curriculum equipped you to motivate and train laypersons to work in the church..... SA A NA D SD

13.0 The seminary curriculum prepared you to build a church staff team.....SA A NA D SD

14.0 The seminary curriculum equipped you with interpersonal skills ..... SA A NA D SD

**Additional education**

15.0 Since you have left the seminary, have you received additional training in any of the following areas? (check all that apply)

Decision-making _____
Leadership _____
Problem-solving _____
Communication _____
Team Building _____
Conflict resolution _____
Time Management _____
Pastoral Counseling _____
Administration _____
Financial Planning _____

**Your Opinion**

16. Who do you think should teach seminary courses?

_____
_____
_____

17. What changes would you like to see in the seminary program?

_____
_____
_____

18. Do you feel that ministerial education should take place at the site of application?

_____

_____

_____

**PART II**

Please complete or check mark next to the categories that apply to you.

Male _____ Female _____

Age _____

**Current religious affiliation**: (check one)
Episcopal Church _____
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America_____
Presbyterian Church _____
United Church of Christ _____
United Methodist Church _____
Other _____

**Marital status**: (check one)
Married _____
Single _____
Separated or divorced _____
Widowed _____

**Highest level of education completed**: (check one)
Bachelors Degree _____
Masters degree _____
Doctorate _____
Post Doctoral _____

Did you attend seminary? Yes ____ No _____

If yes, did you graduate? Yes _____ No _____

**Ethnicity**: (check one)
African American _____
Asian _____
Caucasian _____
Filipino _____
Hispanic or Latino _____
Native American or Native Alaskan _____
Pacific Islander _____
Other _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the Pastoral survey, please include your business card in the return envelope provided.

Name:_____

CONTENT VALIDATION FORM

1. Read questions 1 through 14 on the survey instrument.
2. Decide which of the two categories each of the survey item should be classified in.
3. Place the number of each survey item after its appropriate category.

| RESEARCH OBJECTIVE | RELATED INSTRUMENT ITEM |
|---|---|
| Determine the perceived needs of the senior pastor in the local contemporary church | |
| Determine the attitude of the senior pastor toward the education that the theological institution provided for their leadership role in the local church. | |



APPENDIX B